

Framing Memory: Return to the Zone

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Abstract

This paper uses the authors' practice research project, Father-land, as a case study for identifying the dynamic interrelationship between memories of place and the processes of location filmmaking. The Father-land project began with a month-long artist residency in Nicosia, the principal output being a collaborative archive-based essay film that investigates notions of home and (dis)placement in the divided island of Cyprus, when its 'archive' only exists in the filmmakers' memories and the material traces of the urban landscape along the southern edge of the demilitarised buffer zone across the island.

Political and social histories, the legacies of colonialism, occupation, and the Cold War, resonate culturally and also biographically for the authors as both had childhood links with Cyprus through fathers stationed there with the Royal Air Force. NiMAC, in the old walled city of Nicosia, is close to the buffer zone, patrolled by the United Nations Peacekeeping Force, which separates the Turkish-occupied northern section of the island from the Greek Cypriot south.

The period of quiet reflection provided by the residency allowed us to venture into unexplored regions of shared, but separate, histories. To make sense of our collective past, we drew on formative experiences of both being 'RAF children', uprooted from one country to another – patriarchal baggage moved by the forces of neo-colonialism. This was infected by the uneasy stasis of the unresolved conflict that tore the island in two over forty years ago, and the ruins of the past.

Keywords: Archive, Buffer Zone, Cyprus, Essay Film, Memory.

Introduction

Father-land is a twenty-minute single channel colour film with stereo sound, made collaboratively by the authors, filmmaker and doctoral researcher Stuart Moore and artist filmmaker Kayla Parker, on location in Nicosia, Republic of Cyprus. This practice research project developed through an artist residency, which was facilitated and funded jointly by the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre (NiMAC) and the research group for Land/Water and the Visual Arts, School of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Plymouth, UK. We spent four weeks as resident artists at NiMAC in November 2016, followed by an additional week of residency during spring 2018. The principal output of the *Father-land* project is an essay film that investigates notions of home and (dis)

placement in the divided island of Cyprus through our memories and encounters with the material traces of the urban landscape along the southern edge of the UN buffer zone in Nicosia. Political and social histories, the legacies of colonialism, occupation, and the Cold War, resonate culturally and also biographically for us, as we both had childhood links with Cyprus through fathers stationed there with the Royal Air Force. *Father-land* will be shown at NiMAC in October and November 2018, in the Layers of Visibility exhibition curated by Liz Wells and Yiannis Toumazis, close to where the film was made.

Background

Cyprus is a strategic island in the eastern Mediterranean with a long history of settlement by external peoples. The Mycenaean Greeks settled in the second millennium BCE, and the island was subsequently occupied by Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Lusignans, Genoese, Venetians, and Ottomans. Control passed to Britain in 1878, and the island was formally annexed in 1914 (Lonely Planet, 2018). The former British colony gained its independence in 1960 following years of resistance (CIA, 2018). After years of inter-communal violence, in 1963 United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping Forces were called in to secure what came to be known as the Green Line, a de facto cease fire line that separated Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in the capital Nicosia. This formed the basis for the demilitarised buffer zone that today partitions the island. Following the occupation of the northern third of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974, the division was formalised and is still monitored and enforced by the UN. Since this time, the island has been separated into the internationally recognised southern part controlled by Republic of Cyprus and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), which is recognized only by Turkey (Pellapaisiotis, 2014, 135).

Both the authors come from families with fathers who were military personnel serving with the Royal Air Force (RAF). In the latter half of the twentieth century, following the Second World War, the RAF maintained bases around the globe. Airmen could be posted to any of these locations, as required – sometimes for a few weeks, at other times for several years. As children, we learned that our fathers could disappear at a moment's notice, returning home with souvenirs, but giving little explanation of what they had been doing while they were away. Family life was nomadic, and we both moved to new homes several times – usually within Britain, but also to Europe and the Far East. Cyprus was a strategic location during the Cold War period,

and both fathers were stationed there at different times. One of the authors, Kayla Parker, lived in on the island for three years as a child, when her father was working in RAF Akrotiri on the south coast. Stuart Moore's father was deployed to Cyprus several times, whilst the family remained in Britain – he has a strong memory of a red pencil case, marked on the front with a map of the island in gold and the names of the principal towns in black, a gift from his father.

The authors do not know whether their respective family histories overlapped in Cyprus, but we were interested in pursuing common experiences about dislocation and home through the artist residency. We did not set out to make a documentary about the past or present political situation on the island, but hoped to find resonances through our exploration of the place itself. The form of our film was not prescribed in its planning stage, rather, it evolved organically through the processes of its making. During the initial four weeks of our Nicosia residency at the end of 2016, living and filming near the buffer zone became a quiet reflection on the uneasy stasis of the unresolved conflict which tore the island in two over forty years ago. Our families played small parts in the island's past, and the challenge for us seemed to be situating our essay film's narrative in its own 'buffer zone' between the island's contested history and placeless personal reflection.

We chose the self-reflective and self-reflexive hybridity of the essay film because it "disrespects traditional boundaries, is transgressive both structurally and conceptually" (Alter, 1996, 171). It allows us to interweave personal and social histories with subjective and intellectual perspectives, situated in contemporary experience. For the producer and director Joram ten Brink, the essay film "follows Montaigne's, Vertov's and Astruc's steps in 'writing' fragments as they occur to the writer, or the film maker. These fragments are in turn edited together associatively, relying on poetic metaphor and juxtaposition" (1999, 9). The form blurs traditional boundaries of documentary and fiction. As filmmakers, it gives us freedom because we can "debate a problem by using all the means that the cinema affords, all the registers and all the expedients" (Morin in Rascaroli, 2008, 39).

Our film is not just a personal reflection that could be realised anywhere; it is actually placed in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. It is a site-specific work – the film is infused with the place. The profilmic events recorded are important to the meaning of the film, but, in addition, we wish to express the interiority of the filmmaking itself. As artist filmmakers, we are not denying the importance of the scene that is recorded as poetic documentation, but we suggest that the affect of the place and our experiences whilst working are important ingredients in the production process.



Image 1 – *Father-land*: view through apartment window in the old walled city of Nicosia, close to the Buffer Zone. Film Still. Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore, 2018.

Image 1 is the view filmed from inside our apartment through the Venetian window blinds. The steady camera captures the gentle swaying of the palm trees, a scene repeated from countless windows in the old walled city. Looking towards the buffer zone, it reminds us of the paradox of domestic and militarised spaces co-existing. A visible aspect of the border is that the southern side remains temporary in form – rusty oil drums filled with concrete – despite remaining in place for over forty years. A large eucalyptus tree we can see from the rooftop outside our apartment has been growing freely in the buffer zone for several decades. Wild life thrives in this no man's land, a sanctuary largely untouched by human activity where vegetation overflows the broken, sandbagged buildings and fills the dusty alleys, and sounds pass from one side to the other like the birds and feral animals which have made the zone their home.

In our initial research period during the residency in November 2016, we reflected on our idea of home, in relation to the German word *heimlich*, to identify similarities and differences between where we live in Plymouth, a coastal city on the south-western edge of Europe, and where we were staying in Nicosia whilst artists in residence. Plymouth and Nicosia are both currently undergoing 'regeneration', with old buildings being knocked down and new high-rise blocks being put up. In Plymouth, we live just outside the old town walls, very close to the new mosque – but there is no call to prayer. In Nicosia we stayed a hundred metres from the UN buffer zone. The calls to prayer broadcast live several times each day from Istanbul via loud speakers sited at the great Selimiye mosque just north of the buffer zone ordered our daily rhythms. Plymouth is two hours behind Nicosia, although both Britain and the Republic of Cyprus put the clocks back at the end of October – this created an otherworldly experience for us when we first arrived in the country, as daylight began to fall around 3.30pm to 4.00pm, but our body clocks were still set to lunchtime in the UK. This feeling of being slightly 'out of place' was reinforced by the dry warm conditions in Nicosia – in contrast to the severe storms and heavy rainfall of the contemporaneous British weather.

The Privileged Outsider

Is it possible, or even desirable, to return to a point of origin in our past? In (re)visiting the sites of memory, we (re)experience the dislocation of exile, feeling uprooted from home, family, ourselves – baggage that has gone astray in transit, lost luggage that cannot be reclaimed.

The residency has provided us with an opportunity to think about ideas of marginalisation, exclusion and expropriation; to reflect on (re)turning – turning back time, rewinding the clock, traveling back to the mythic scene of idyllic oneness, a rounded wholeness of self. And also informs our ethical approach. We embark on our journey, knowing that we will never reach our destination.

The Algerian-French writer Hélène Cixous writes about departing “so as not to arrive”, positioning scenes of expulsion as “the very form ... of our relationship to the world” (in Weltman-Aron, 2015, xiv). She uses the term *arrivante de toujours* for:

a position of non appropriation of and nonbelonging in a place. That figure retains the ethical dimension of uprootedness, claims only to visit or pass through the land or home of others, and puts into question the stance of the privileged outsider. (Weltman-Aron, 2015, xiv)

Subjective camera places the person who looks at the film in the same relation with the screen as the one of the cinematographer with her subjects. Used by the French-American cinematographer and filmmaker Babette Mangolte in *The Camera: Je, La Caméra: I* (1977), her strategy makes the viewer understand and perceive the relation between a photographer and her subjects, and is also a metaphor for the disengagement of the photographer and the desire to be included ‘within’, to be inside it – a participant. The film “offers a reflection on ways of seeing, and the interpersonal and power dynamics involved in producing images” (Essay Film Festival, 2017). In *The Camera: Je, La Caméra: I*, Mangolte uses moving image to examine stills photography, and makes the viewer aware of the difference between motion and stillness.

Our principal photographic strategy was to use static framing, with the camera fixed on a tripod. The stasis of the ‘locked off’ view enables the audience quiet contemplation of the buffer zone, this monument to a silenced history, whose ‘falling-down-ness’ embodies post-colonial detritus and conveys an uneasy prescience of a potential post-apocalyptic future. The still-moving frames of the locked-off shots resonate in the (apparently) unchanging form of the buffer zone. We made a decision to eschew traveling shots – walking along or driving whilst filming – as this could be read by the audience as implying that the buffer zone is navigable – like a quotidian road closure obstructed by a temporary barrier.



Image 2 – *Father-land*: view north over the buffer zone in Nicosia towards the Pentadaktily mountains. Film Still. Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore, 2018.

At ground level, streets that once passed through the buffer zone are barricaded with concrete-filled oil drums, sandbags and barbed wire. Image 2, filmed from our apartment rooftop approximately one hundred metres from the buffer zone, looks towards the Turkish Cypriot north. The elevated viewpoint and the use of a telephoto lens collapses distance, pulling the mountains closer, and highlights the free movement of birds across the divide. Both halves of the old city are bathed in the same autumn sunlight and the soft breeze gently moves the trees.

At every vantage point along the southern edge of the buffer zone in the old walled city of Nicosia, there are notices forbidding photography. Armed soldiers are stationed at border posts to guard the perimeter and monitor people’s movements in the proximity of the controlled area. Aiming a camera towards ‘the other side’ is not allowed – despite being able to pass through the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot border crossing points between south and north and traveling to that viewed space. Once there, we are forbidden again from aiming our camera back to see from where we have come.

In filmmaking this aligns with the technique of the ‘shot/countershot’ traditionally used in dialogue scenes,

wherein one character is shown looking (often off-screen) at another character, and then the other character is shown looking ‘back’ at the first character. Since the characters are shown facing in opposite directions, the viewer unconsciously assumes that they are looking at each other. (Bordwell, 2008, 57-74)

For David Bordwell, this establishes the spatial relationship between characters in narrative cinema. It was not possible for us to achieve the shot/countershot between the Greek Cypriot south of the city and the Turkish Cypriot north on the ‘other side’ of the buffer zone. This seemed to resonate with the still-unresolved political situation of an island divided for over forty years. In some places, such as the area close to where we stayed in Nicosia, “the separation between the two sides is as little as a single house or less” (Pellapaisiotis, 2012, 135). Yet, the gap between the two sides exists, and the buffer zone is off limits, and this reinforces the situation in which one is unable to ‘see’ the other.

Father-land draws on Mangolte's reflexive explorations of landscape and place and the conversational exchange in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* to explore our own histories in this divided island. The title of Mangolte's 1991 film, *Visible Cities*, is a pun on Calvino's novel, in which he creates an imagined dialogue between the emperor Kublai Khan and the explorer Marco Polo about imaginary and dreamed of cities. In Mangolte's film, the focus is on the construction of new condominiums cities in Southern California, and a conversation between two powerless women in a world dominated by men and money.

We felt at home in Nicosia, and spent our time living, thinking, walking, and filming. Space was needed in our filmmaking process to allow for reflection and our conversations before we were ready to move into screenwriting and post-production.

Visible Cities was shot and edited over a two-year period, a process Mangolte describes as, "circling the terrain" (2004). Commenting recently, she states that the film gives "a voice to the landscape as well as exploring off-screen presence and subjectivity" (Mangolte, 2017).

Returning to Nicosia in March 2018, we spent another week as resident artists of the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre, making field recordings and doing additional filming, and recording our conversations in and around the UN buffer zone, during which we attempted to make sense of our collective past, drawing on our formative experiences of both being 'RAF children', uprooted from one country to another – patriarchal baggage moved by neo-colonial forces. As the geopolitical cards fell during the latter half of the twentieth century, so people were shuffled around and lived with the consequences of exile and displacement.

In considering the notion of occupation, related to the conceptualisation of the UN buffer zone, the Green Line, a demilitarized no-man's land occupied by United Nations troops, as a 'dead zone' – from the Greek term *nekri zoni* – essentialised as a space of absence, mystery, and 'otherness'. We can think of this zone as a void, a nullity inhabited by lizards and pigeons, a wilderness caught in the rift of discordant histories; territories of memory activated by the shift patterns of UN patrols moving east and west and the intermittent flow of border crossings between north and south. A lacuna: an unfilled section, a blank, a cavity, a hollow, a missing section of text, an extended silence in a piece of music, a lexical gap in a language.

However, we regard the Green Line as a place of possibility, of potential, of interaction, linked to the Ancient Greek word *χλόν*, 'the green of new growth'. This rupture in the landscape releases energy. Seen on Google Earth, the zone is a visible greenness growing across the country, because of the trees and vegetation that have grown during the past decades of separation and abandonment. With reference to the paper, 'The Cyprus Buffer Zone as a Socio-Ecological Landscape', by Costas M. Constantinou and Evi Eftychiou (2014), the buffer zone, a space between languages and culture, 'speaks' through its absence. This liminal zone excludes, yet "preserves a space of

difference informed by an experience of marginalization and nonbelonging" (Weltman-Aron, 2015, xiv).



Image 3 – *Father-land*: view north over the buffer zone in Nicosia. Film Still. Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore, 2018.

The scars of the violent conflict over four decades ago are still visible. Buildings bear the marks of bullet holes and firing positions. These traces exist frozen in time while the trappings of twenty-first century life, such as satellite dishes and solar panels, accrue alongside.

The Zone of Memory

The noted writer on phenomenology of place, Dylan Trigg, proposes there are three 'places of memory'. He locates memory as an embodied experience of place, which "allows a heightened interplay between the bodily self and the material world" (Trigg, 2012). In making *Father-land*, we drew on Trigg's second memory category, that is, the 'place of memory'. The physical manifestations of the Green Line correspond to sites that he characterises as "sites of trauma, and ruins that portend to events outside the memory of the living subject" (Trigg, 2012). Trigg's observation that "[t]his transition from the memory of place to the place of memory mirrors a shift from a phenomenological focus on lived experience to a hermeneutic analysis of the environment" (Trigg, 2012). This parallels the interplay between the episodic memories we have of our past and our reflexive engagement with the landscape of the buffer zone in Nicosia during our residency. The film *Father-land* creates a digital monument. Although immaterial, it is nonetheless an artefact of the place of memory.

The Nicosia buffer zone may be considered as a 'ruined artefact', reflecting the growing scholarly interest in 'modern ruins' – declined urban environments and derelict spaces – that the human geographers DeSilvey and Edensor refer to as *Ruinenlust* (2012). In addition, Brian Dillon's 2011 survey considers the modern ruin as an ambivalent locus of modernism, memory, and the cultural afterlife of eras such as those of state communism and colonialism. Trigg invests the word 'ruins' as designating "a location of memory, in which trauma took place and continues to be inextricably bound with that location in both an affective and evidential manner" (2009, 88).

Soundings

The second visit to Nicosia in spring 2018 allowed us to record additional sound and to archive audio reflections of our memories of a militarised, nomadic childhood, which intersected with our fathers' posting to Cyprus during the Cold War, before the fracturing of the island in 1974. The temporal discontinuity between the picture capture during the original residency period in autumn 2016 and the sound recordings we made on location in and beside the buffer zone on our return trip functions as a practical filmmaking strategy. This gap creates time for us to review our experience before embarking on the screenwriting and post-production phase. Through this process, the final form of the film is changed. The sound design of *Father-land* comprises audio recorded with the pictures, field recordings which underscore certain visual sequences, and the voices of two narrators, spoken by the authors, who are never seen by the audience. Robert Bresson tells us that "the ear goes towards the within, the eye towards the outer: Image and sound must not support each other, but must work each in turn through a sort of relay" (1977, 62). The dialogic exchanges add a reflexive dimension to the film, recording our voices without filming allowed us to 'be in the zone', rather than describing the camera's view. As Mangolte advises, "[o]nce your mind is solely focused on sounds, you are much freer to find associative moments and interactions with the image than if you are recording image and sound together" (2003, 271).

In the production of *Father-land*, we rejected the common essay film method of overlaying the visual material with studio-based recordings of narration. We felt it was important to record our conversational exchanges on location to infuse the words with the genius loci of the zone – both in terms of the audio ambience and so that our words are inflected by being spoken 'in place'. We posit that the act of 'speaking in place' infuses the dialogue with resonances of (the) place. In this, a vibration is generated between our embodied subjectivities as filmmakers and the environment of the Nicosia buffer zone, which the audience experiences as an aural uncanny. Our voices are 'in the picture', but are not visibly located on screen. Through this process, we aim to bring a sensory *unheimlich* into the film by displacing the familiar authoritative commentary of the documentary. In order to record our spoken words in a 'public space' without attracting too much attention, we used a small, high quality microphone plugged into an iPhone. Although the buffer zone signs didn't proscribe making audio recordings, the act of commenting felt transgressive – another aspect of 'speaking in place' is an awareness of the sensitivities of the site and its histories.

Trigg describes how visiting places where conflict has taken place, creates a tension between the place and the trauma, which,

surrounded by an aura of hauntings and spectrality, instils a threshold in the viewer: as much we attempt to commune with this immediate environment, so there is a sense in being watched by the environment. This reversible duality gathers a resonance thanks to the collision of worlds, spatial and temporal, with each diametrically opposed to the other. The reality of the traumatic event is not reinforced in this encounter, but instead trembles as an incommensurable void is given a voice between the viewer and the place. (Trigg, 2009, 99)

Conclusion

In the autumn of 2018, *Father-land* will be screened in a gallery close to the street in Nicosia where the original inter-communal violence between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots erupted in 1963. Today, as conflict tourists mingle with the inhabitants walking along the Green Line in the walled city, there is little to experience of the traumatic events that took place half a century ago and the continuing impact on people's lives. The abandoned buildings and overgrown sites that sometimes spill out southwards beyond the Green Line speak of the otherness that radiates from the zone.

The project, as a dialogic collaboration, moved from a conversational exchange whilst planning and filming on location to an essay film, where recordings of our spoken voices become a register of meaning. In this way, "a cinematic 'text' becomes the 'reflexive text', the mediating medium between the film maker and the spectator" (ten Brink, 1991, 9). We hope our film will provide a contextualisation of the effects of postcolonialism, mediated through our experiences as children and as filmmakers whose histories have brushed against this divided island.

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Filmography

Father-land. (2018)., Directed by Kayla Parker and Stuart Moore., UK: Sundog Media. HD film. 20min colour.

The Camera: Je, La Caméra: I., (1977)., Directed by Babette Mangolte., USA. 16mm 88min b+w and colour.

Visible Cities. (1991)., Directed by Babette Mangolte., USA. 16mm 31min colour.